The President's News Conference With President Nelson Mandela of South Africa in Cape Town

March 27, 1998

President Mandela. Thank you, Please sit down.

President Clinton, a visit by a foreign head of state to a country is, broadly speaking, one of the most significant developments in entrenched strong political and economic relations between the countries concerned. During this last 4 years, we have received a record number of heads of states and heads of government. They have come from all continents and practically from every country. They have come from the industrial nations; they have come from the developing world. Some have advanced democratic institutions; in others, such institutions are just developing—are only just developing; in others, there are none at all.

We have received all of them, and we have welcomed those visitors because that they have taught us things which we have not known before. We have democratic countries, but where poverty of the masses of the people is rife. We have had countries where there are no popular institutions at all, but they are able to look after their people better than the so-called democratic countries.

I have visited one which is a creditor nation, which has got one of the highest standards of living in the world, which is tax-free, which has got one of the best schemes of subsidy for housing, for medical services, and where education is free and compulsory. And yet, the people in that country have no votes; they have no parliament. And yet they are looked after better than in so called democratic countries. We insist that even in those countries that people must have votes. Even though they may enjoy all the things which the masses of the people in other countries don't enjoy, democratic institutions are still critical.

So we have received heads of states and heads of government from all those countries. But the visit to our country by President Clinton is the high watermark. And I hope that the response of our parliamentarians yesterday has indicated that very clearly.

Our people have welcomed President Clinton with open arms. And it is correct that that should be so, because President Clinton, as well as the First Lady, Hillary, they have the correct instincts on the major international questions facing the world today. Whatever mistakes that they may have made—and we have made many—but there is one thing that you cannot be accused of: of not having the right instincts. And for that reason, I hold him, and almost every South African, in high respect. The fact that we have high respect for him does not mean that we have no differences. But I would like to declare that when we have differed on an issue, at the end of that, my respect for him is enhanced because I fully accept his integrity and his bona fides, but such differences are unavoidable.

One of the first heads of state I invited to this country was Fidel Castro. I have received in this country ex-president Rafsanjani of Iran. I have also invited the leader Qadhafi to this country. And I do that because our moral authority dictates that we should not abandon those who helped us in the darkest hour in the history of this country. Not only did they support us in rhetoric, they gave us the resources, for us to conduct the struggle, and the will. And those South Africans who have berated me for being loyal to our friends, literally, they can go and throw themselves into a pool. [*Laughter*] I am not going to betray the trust of those who helped us.

The United States is acknowledged far and wide as the world leader, and it is correct; that should be so. And we have, today, a leader, as I have said, whose instincts are always correct. I would like to draw attention to a very important provision in the United Nations Charter, that provision which enjoins, which calls upon all member states to try and settle their differences by peaceful methods. That is the correct position which has influenced our own approach towards problems.

We had a government which had slaughtered our people, massacred them like flies, and we had a black organization which we used for that purpose. It was very repugnant to think that we could sit down and talk with these people, but we had to subject our blood to our brains and to say, without these enemies of ours, we

can never bring about a peaceful transformation in this country. And that is what we did.

The reason why the world has opened its arms to South Africans is because we're able to sit down with our enemies and to say, "Let us stop slaughtering one another. Let's talk peace." We were complying with the provisions of the United Nations Charter. And the United States as the leader of the world should set an example to all of us to help eliminating tensions throughout the world. And one of the best ways of doing so is to call upon its enemies to say, "Let's sit down and talk peace." I have no doubt that the role of the United States as the world leader will be tremendously enhanced.

I must also point out that we are far advanced in our relations with the United States as a result of the efforts of Deputy President Thabo Mbeki and Vice President Al Gore. That biennial commission has achieved—has had a high rate of performance far beyond our dreams. And today, America has become the largest investor in our country. Trade between us has increased by 11 percent.

And we have the president of the ANC who carefully pushed me out of this position—[*laughter*]—and took it over. The president of the ANC and the Deputy President of this country is one of those who, more than anybody else in this country, is committed to the improvement of relations between South Africa and the United States. I hope that when he succeeds in pushing me to step down from the Presidency, that the country will put him in that position, so that he can be in a position further to improve relations between us. And I have no doubt that we have no better person than him to complete this job.

President Clinton, you are welcome. This is one of our proudest moments, to be able to welcome you. You helped us long before you became President, and you have continued with that help now as the President of the greatest country in the world. Again, welcome.

President Clinton. Thank you very much, Mr. President. Thank you and all the people of South Africa for the wonderful welcome you have given to Hillary and me and to our entire delegation. We have felt very much at home here.

As I have said yesterday in my address to the Parliament, I was very honored to be the first American President to visit South Africa on a mission to Africa to establish a new partnership between the United States and the nations of Africa and to show the people of America the new Africa that is emerging, an Africa where the number of democratic governments has quadrupled since 1990, where economies are beginning to grow, where deep-seated problems, to be sure, continue to exist, but where hope for the future is stronger than it has been in a generation.

It is in our profound interest to support the positive changes in Africa's life. Nowhere is this more evident than in the miracle you have wrought here in South Africa.

The partnership between our nations is only 4 years old, but already we are laying the foundation for a greater future. And I think everyone knows that the most important reason for our success is President Mandela.

His emergence from his many years on Robben Island is one of the true heroic stories of the 20th century. And more importantly, he emerged not in anger but in hope, passion, determination to put things right in a spirit of reconciliation and harmony. Not only here but all over the world, people, especially young people, have been moved by the power of his example.

Yesterday, Mr. Mandela said that the only thing that disappointed him about our trip was that Hillary and I did not bring our daughter. [*Laughter*] Last night our daughter called us and said the only reason she was really sorry not to have made her second trip to Africa was that she didn't get to see President Mandela.

I think that the impact he has had on the children of the world who see that fundamental goodness and courage and largeness of spirit can prevail over power lust, division, and obsessive smallness in politics, is a lesson that everybody can learn every day from. And we thank you, Mr. President, for that.

Today we talked about how the United States and South Africa can move into the future together. We have reaffirmed our commitment to increasing our mutual trade and investment, to bringing the advantages of the global economy to all our people. South Africa is already our largest trading partner in Africa, and as the President said, America is the largest foreign investor in South Africa. And we want to do more.

The presence here of our Commerce Secretary and leaders from our business community underscores, Mr. President, how important these ties are to us and our determination to do better. Our Overseas Private Investment Corporation is creating three new investment funds for Africa which will total more than three-quarters of a billion dollars. The first of these, the Africa Opportunity Fund, is already supporting transportation and telecommunications projects here in South Africa. The largest of the funds, worth $500 million, will help to build the roads, the bridges, the communication networks Africa needs to fulfill its economic potential.

Increasing trade does not mean ending aid. I am proud that we have provided almost a billion dollars in assistance to South Africa since 1991. I am committed to working with Congress to return our aid for all of Africa to its historic high levels. We will target our assistance to investing in the future of the African people. If people lack the fundamentals of a decent life, like education or shelter, they won't be able to seize opportunity.

I announced in Uganda a new $120 million initiative to train teachers, increase exchanges, bring technology into classrooms throughout Africa. We're also working to help provide better housing for those who have never had it. Yesterday Hillary, with me in tow, went back, a year later, to visit the Victoria Mxenge Housing Project in Gugiiletu, where women are building their own houses and living in decent homes for the first time. I'm proud that through our aid projects and our Binational Commission with Mr. Mbeki and Vice President Gore we are providing seed money and technical assistance for this effort. And I want to do more of that throughout this country and throughout the continent.

President Mandela was also kind enough to speak with me at some length about other nations in Africa and our common goals for Africa in the future. We are determined to help countries as they work to strengthen their democracies. We agree human rights are the universal birthright of all people. I also had a great chance to talk to President Mandela about the progress we made at the regional summit in Entebbe. And he had read the communique we put out, and I think that we both agree it was a remarkable document. And if we can make it real, it will change things in a profound way in all the countries that signed off on the statement.

We're also working on security issues, and let me just mention a couple. We are committed to preventing the spread of weapons of mass destruction, to strengthening the Biological Weapons Convention, because we both believe disease must never be used as a weapon of war. We are both at the forefront of the effort to eliminate the scourge of landmines. And now we are joining together to speed this work.

As I said yesterday, and I'd like to emphasize again, I am very pleased that our Department of Defense has decided to purchase now South Africa demining vehicles, called the Chubbies. The vehicles will help us to remove mines more quickly, more safely, and more effectively. And I might say, that's been a terrible problem the world over. Even in Bosnia, where there are so many people, we're not taking enough mines out of the land every week. And the new South African technology will help us immensely.

Mr. President, for centuries the winds that blow around the Cape of Good Hope have been known for strength and danger. Today, the winds blowing through Cape Town and South Africa, and indeed much of this continent, are winds of change and good fortune. I thank you for being so much the cause of the good that is occurring not only in your own country but throughout this continent.

I am deeply pleased that we're committed to harnessing the winds of change together. And as we meet in your nation, which has seen such remarkable hope arise from the ashes of terrible tragedy, let me again thank you. And let me ask your indulgence as I close just to make a few personal remarks about the terrible tragedy we had in the United States, in my home State, where four children and a school teacher were killed and many others were wounded in a horrible shooting incident.

First of all, I have called the Governor, the mayor, and last night I had quite a long conversation with the school principal, to tell them that the thoughts and prayers of people, not only in our country but indeed throughout the world, were with them. I hope, as I have said before, that all of us, including the Federal authorities and the members of the press corps, will give the people in Jonesboro the chance to grieve and bury those who have died.

And then after a decent period, after I return home, the Attorney General and I and others have got to compare this incident with the other two that have occurred in the last few months

in America to try to determine what they have in common and whether there are other things we should do to prevent this kind of thing from happening. There is nothing more tragic, for whatever reason, than a child robbed of the opportunity to grow up.

Thank you, and thank you again, Mr. President, for everything.

Nigeria

Q. Mr. President, you expressed regret the other day that the United States supported authoritarian regimes in Africa during the cold war. Today, we buy about 50 percent of the oil from Nigeria, propping up a regime the United States says is one of the most oppressive in Africa. [*Inaudible*]—what will the United States do—[*inaudible*]?

President Clinton. Well, first of all, let me restate what I said because I think it's worth saying again. I said that I did not believe the United States had ever been as good a partner to the African nations and the African people as we could have been and that during the cold war, when we and the Soviets were worried about the standoff that we had between us, we tended to evaluate governments in Africa and to pick and chose among them and to give aid to them based far more on how they stood in the fight of the cold war than how they stood toward the welfare of their people. I stand by that. And I think now we're free to take a different course.

President Mandela and I actually talked at some length about this today, and I, frankly, asked for his advice. And Nigeria is the largest country in Africa in terms of population. It does have vast oil resources. It has a large army. It in capable of making a significant contribution to regional security, as we have seen in the last several months. My policy is to do all that we can to persuade General Abacha to move toward general democracy and respect for human rights, release of the political prisoners, the holding of elections. If he stands for election, we hope he will stand as a civilian.

There are many military leaders who have taken over chaotic situations in African countries but have moved toward democracy. And that can happen in Nigeria; that's, purely and simply, what we want to happen. Sooner, rather than later, I hope.

Cuba

Q. President Clinton, I wonder, was the Dow Chemical dispute discussed anywhere, and if so, has there been a resolution of the problem that affects South Africa in particular?

President Clinton. We only discussed it very briefly. You know what American law is. It was passed by our Congress by almost 90 percent in both Houses, after two American planes with American citizens were illegally shot down in international waters by the Cuban Air Force, and basically says American companies can't do business there.

We are—the Pope's recent visit to Cuba gave us the hope that we might do more to help the welfare of the Cuban people and to promote alternative institutions, like the church in Cuba, that would move the country toward freedom. And I hope that will happen. But the law is what it is.

Slavery

Q. On regret again, sir, why are you resisting those who are seeking a formal apology from the United States for America's own shame of slavery?

President Clinton. Well, let me say, first of all, there are two different issues here on the slavery issue. Most of the members of the African-American community with whom I talk at home advise me to keep our race initiative focused on the future.

I don't think anybody believes that there is a living American—I don't think that anyone believes that any living American today would defend, feel proud of, or in any way stand up for the years where we had slavery or the awful legacy which it left in its wake. But we have moved through now in the last 130, almost 140 years, the 13th, 14th, and 15th amendments, a spate of civil rights legislation. We're now focused on what still needs to be done, and it's considerable.

So at home we're looking to the future, to closing the opportunity gap, to dealing with the discrimination that still exists, trying to lift up those communities that have done better than others, as we become not primarily just a divided society between blacks and whites but increasingly multiracial, not only with our large Hispanic and Native American populations but with people from all over the world.

Now, in addition to that, what I tried to do the other day in Uganda is to recognize that the role of Americans in buying slaves, which were taken out of Africa by European slave traders, had a destructive impact in Africa, as well as for the people who were enslaved and taken to America. And I think that was an appropriate thing to do. I don't think anybody would defend what we did in terms of its destructive impact in Africa. No American President had ever been here before, had a chance to say that. And I think we want more and more African leaders to do what President Museveni did the other day when we were in Entebbe, and he said, "I am not one of those leaders that blames everybody else for our problem." I think we've got—you know, you've got to quit going back to the colonial era; we've got to look to the future.

If you want more African leaders to do that, which I do, then it seems to me that we have to come to terms with our past. And stating the facts, it seems to me, is helpful. If we're going to be a good partner with people who are taking responsibility for their own future, we can't be blind to the truths of the past.

That's what—I think Mr. Mandela has done a remarkable job of balancing those two things here in South Africa. That's why I made the statement I did in Uganda, and I'm glad I did it.

African Debt Relief

Q. President Clinton, I wonder whether you could tell us whether debt relief for Africa has been a topic in your discussions with President Mandela, and whether you will be taking South Africa's views on the subject back into the G–7 and into other international arenas to argue for such debt relief?

President Clinton. Well, the answer to that question is, we discussed debt relief. I've also discussed debt relief with all the other leaders with whom I have met. We have—there is presently a proposal, as I think you're aware, that includes not only bilateral debt but debt to the international institutions, which would permit African countries that are pursuing economic reform to get debt relief to up to 80 percent of their debt.

And I think it's a sound proposal in the sense that, if it's properly administered by the international authorities—for this reason—we supported the idea that people should be eligible for debt relief, more debt relief if they were moving toward economic reform but not saying that everybody had to reach the same point, because people start from—they start from different places, different countries do—different per capita incomes, different economic systems, different real possibilities.

So I think that the framework is there. Now, what I pledged to do after talking to all the people with whom I have met, President Mandela and the other leaders that I saw on the way down here, is to take a look at how this thing is going to work in fact, and see what I could do to make sure that we give as much aid as we possibly can under this proposal. But I do think it is legitimate to say, if you want debt relief to unleash the economic potential of a country, so you take the burden off of it, then when it's all said and done, there has to be—two things have to exist: Number one, you've got to have a set of policies that will produce better results in the future than you had in the past, in any country; and number two, the country has to be able to attract investment, both private and public investment, in the future.

So, for example, if you just had uncritical, 100 percent debt relief, you wouldn't guarantee that there would be better policies, number one. Now, that doesn't apply to South Africa, where you do have a good strong economic policy, but generally. Number two, if we did that, other people would be reluctant to loan money in the future because they would think they would never get any of their money back.

So I think the trick is to get enough debt relief to countries to get the debt burden down so they can grow and they're not just crushed and kept from making any progress, but to do it in a way so that the debt relief produces longer term prosperity. And that's my goal. And yes, we're going to talk about it at the G–8 meeting in Great Britain. And I will stay on top of this to make sure that what we're trying to get done is actually accomplished. Everybody talked to me about it.

Jonesboro Incident

Q. Mr. President, during this trip you've spoken out about genocidal violence in Africa, but the sort of random killings you referred to in the Jonesboro killings has terrified people in the United States with alarming frequency. How do you explain that? What can you say now

and what can you do now as America's leader to root out such violence from the culture?

President Clinton. Well, we worked on it very hard for 5 years, and the crime rate's gone down for 5 years. The violent crime rate has gone down for 5 years quite dramatically in many cities.

And I saw an analysis, actually, just before I left home, in the documents that I read every Sunday, I saw an analysis of the declining crime rate which essentially said that, obviously, the improving American economy contributed to the crime rate going down because more people had jobs, and particularly with regard to property crimes, it was more attractive to work than to steal. But the other reason was that policing and law enforcement and prevention is better now than it was 5 years ago. And crime is a problem that many societies, especially many more urbanized societies, have.

And all I can tell you is that the violent crime rate is going down in our country; it's still way too high. What I'm concerned about in the Jonesboro case or in the Paducah case or in the case of the Mississippi issue is whether we are doing enough to deal with the question of violence by juveniles and is there something else we can do to get it down even more?

Ask President Mandela a question. I'm tired. [*Laughter*]

President Mandela. No personal questions. [*Laughter*]

African Trade Legislation

Q. Not today, Mr. President.

Mr. President, have you raised with President Clinton the question of the United States-Africa growth and opportunity—[*inaudible*]—and the large number of conditionality clauses in that, and pointed out to him that this would appear to be in conflict with the United States commitment to free trade?

President Mandela. Well, this matter has been fully discussed between President Clinton and our Deputy President, Thabo Mbeki. And I fully endorse the point of view that was placed before the President by the Deputy President. These matters are the subject of discussions, and they are very sensitive matters. And I appreciate the curiosity of the media, but it is better sometimes merely to say this is a matter over which we have serious reservations, this legislation. To us, it is not acceptable. But nevertheless, we accept each other's integrity, and we are discussing that matter in that spirit. Yes, we are taking it up.

President Clinton. If I could just say one thing about it, though. If you all actually go read the bill, I think you will find two things. First, and the most important thing is, if the bill becomes law, it will increase the access of all African nations to the American market, without conditionality. The bill opens up more of the American market to all African trade. The bill then says, for countries that make greater strides toward democracy, human rights, and economic reform, there will be greater access still.

But since we are not imposing new burdens on anybody or picking and choosing winners among countries and instead saying, "Okay, we're going to unilaterally make an effort to give more access to all Africa countries but we'll do even better for the countries that are trying harder on democracy, human rights, and economic reform," it seemed to me to strike the right kind of balance.

I, myself, would not have supported it if it had gone in reverse, if it had imposed new burdens on some countries while giving new benefits to others.

U.S. Response to Genocide in Africa

Q. [*Inaudible*]—genocide in Rwanda, and you said that the United States should have acted sooner to stop the killing. Do you think that American racism, or what you described as American apathy toward Africa, played a role in its inaction? How have you grappled personally with that experience 2 days ago? And have you considered any specific policy changes, given that this isn't the first time in this century America has been slow to act, that would compel a faster American response in the future, besides early warning systems?

President Clinton. Let me say, first of all, I do not believe that there was any—I don't believe there was any racial element in our slow response. I think that—keep in mind, I don't think anybody on the outside was prepared for somewhere between 800,000 and a million people to die in 90 days. And look how long it took the United States and Europe, through NATO and then through the U.N., to put together the machinery to go in and deal with the Bosnia problem.

So I would just say to you, I think that—the point I was trying to make is I do believe that generally America has been and the whole

American policy apparatus has been less responsive and less involved in Africa than was warranted. I think that's a general problem.

But I think in the case of Rwanda, what I believe we have got to do is to establish a system, hopefully through the United Nations, which gives us an early warning system, that gives us the means to go in and try to stop these things from happening before they start, and then, if it looks like a lot of people are going to die in a hurry, that kicks in motion some sort of preventive mechanism before hundreds of thousands of people die.

I mean, if you look at the sheer—the military challenge presented by those who were engaging in the genocide, most of it was done with very elemental weapons. If there had been some sort of multinational response available, some sort of multinational force available, to go in pretty quickly, most of those lives probably could have been saved. And we're going to have to work this out through the U.N. and then figure out how to staff it and how to run it and whether it should be permanent or something you can call up in a hurry, how such people would be trained, what should be done. But my own view is, if we think that that sort of thing is going to happen, it would be better if the U.N. has a means to deal with it in a hurry. And I would be prepared to support the development of such a mechanism.

Q. That brings up the subject of the African Crisis Response Team, who is responsible, and I wondered how your discussions, both of you, went on that?

President Mandela. We had a long program of very important matters to discuss, and unfortunately, we did not discuss that one. Our attitude toward this question is very clear; we support the initiative very fully. All that South Africa is saying is that a force which is intended to deal with problems in Africa must not be commanded by somebody outside this continent. I certainly would never put my troops under somebody who does not belong to Africa. That is the only reservation I've had. Otherwise, I fully accept the idea. It's a measure of the interest which the United States takes in the problems of Africa, and the only difference is this one about the command of that force.

NOTE: The President's 156th news conference began at 12:08 p.m. in the Garden of Tuynhuis. In his remarks, he referred to Gov. Mike Huckabee of Arkansas; Mayor Hubert A. Brodell of Jonesboro, AR; Karen Curtner, principal, Westside Middle School, Jonesboro, AR; Gen. Sani Abacha of Nigeria; and President Yoweri Kaguta Museveni of Uganda. President Mandela referred to President Fidel Castro of Cuba; Hashemi Rafsanjani, former President of Iran; Col. Muammar Qadhafi of Libya; and Deputy President Thabo Mbeki of South Africa, president, African National Congress (ANC).

Exchange With Reporters During a Visit to Robben Island With President Nelson Mandela of South Africa
March 27, 1998

Ahmed M. Kathrada. Ladies and gentlemen of the media, this is not a press conference. You've had your share in Cape Town, and we don't believe in double features. [*Laughter*] But what we want to do now is, our President is going to hand over to President Clinton a quarry rock, with his little finger, authenticated by our President that this is a genuine quarry rock from the quarry where he worked for 13 years.

President Mandela. It's a great honor and a pleasure because, as we have said on many occasions, our victory here is victory in part because you helped us tremendously. Thank you very much.

President Clinton. Thank you.

Mr. Kathrada. May I just say that this is not a press conference. Any question must be confined to Robben Island and Robben Island only, please.

Q. We're just interested in your experience. We'd like to hear firsthand from you about your experiences in this cell.

President Mandela. Well, there were pleasant—[*laughter*]—and unpleasant experiences,